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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI IMMEDIATE 0386
RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT IMMEDIATE 0181
RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT IMMEDIATE 0180
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE IMMEDIATE
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY IMMEDIATE 0101
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK IMMEDIATE 0068
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 001953

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)
SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT, EMBASSY LIAISONS HOLD FIRST MEETING ON
RAB ISSUES

REF: DHAKA 1135

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Geeta Pasi, reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. At a meeting on December 13, the Bangladesh government's designated point of contact on Rapid Action Battalion (RAB)-related issues agreed, in principle, to share names of those officers disciplined for "gross human rights offenses." He also shared statistics on those disciplined, and promised to provide information on specific cases by the next meeting in early January. As the GOB responds to our concerns regarding past human rights violations, we should be prepared to respond by offering assistance to the RAB as it seeks to further improve its human rights performance and become a more professional law enforcement agency. END SUMMARY.

FIRST LIAISON MEETING
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¶2. (C) On December 13, POLOFF met for the first time with the Bangladesh government's designated liaison on RAB-related issues, Home Ministry Deputy Secretary Javed Ahmed. Ahmed has responsibility in the Home Ministry for human rights issues. Although the meeting was primarily for introduction purposes, the meeting covered in detail the type of information the Embassy will seek from the Bangladesh government as we move forward with plans to engage the RAB in human rights and other training.

"THE U.S. HAS THE TRAINING WE WANT"
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¶3. (C) Ahmed stated several times how much the government values U.S. training, and urged the USG to remove its "unofficial ban" on engaging the RAB. He said the training offered by the USG and United Kingdom were the most valuable to them. (NOTE: He confirmed that training being proposed by the British High Commission had not yet begun. END NOTE.) The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the British government aid agency DFID, and the European Commission, were already sponsoring some human rights training through their joint Police Reform Project, but this was not specifically focused on the RAB. "Anyway, the U.S. has the training we want," he repeated several times.

¶4. (C) While he acknowledged the need for human

rights-specific training, Ahmed said the Bangladeshi authorities hoped this would be a segue into eventual counter-terrorism training for the RAB. He cited the fact that the RAB is by far the pre-eminent counter-terrorist force in the country, responsible for arresting numerous Jama'atul Mujahadeen Bangladesh (JMB) and Harkatul Jihad al Islami (HuJi) terrorist "kingpins." He added that the RAB had also improved its human rights records over the past three years. In response, POLOFF emphasized the importance of further progress in curbing cross-fire killings and further government messages to RAB officers about the unacceptability -- and disciplinary consequences -- of the practice.

GOVERNMENT PROVIDES STATISTICS ON DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS
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15. (C) In response to an Embassy request for the number of RAB officers disciplined since 2003, Ahmed provided the following statistics: 409 RAB officers have been charged with serious offenses (including unwarranted deaths, physical harm, torture, etc.) since it was formed in 2003. Twenty-seven have been tried (the equivalent of a court martial) by their parent organization (since many RAB officers are detailed from the military, police, or other branch of government); 10 were tried by criminal courts; 239 faced RAB disciplinary boards internally; 132 are awaiting trial (court martial) by their parent organization; and one was awaiting discipline by the RAB internally. As an outcome of these proceedings, 141 received "major" punishments (including dismissal from their service and/or prison time), and 135 received minor punishments (i.e., fines or other administrative penalties).

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EMBASSY: REQUEST FOR NAMES
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16. (C) POLOFF asked Ahmed for the names of those officers who had received major punishments, including anyone found guilty of what could constitute "gross human rights violations" by U.S. standards. He explained to Ahmed that by attributing responsibility to individuals, it would be a major step forward in removing the shadow of "collective responsibility" for extra-judicial killings that hangs over all RAB officers currently. POLOFF also assured Ahmed the names would be used for internal purposes only, and would not be shared with the public. Ahmed said he thought this would be possible, though he would have to confirm with his superiors and would let us know at our next meeting in early January. (NOTE: POLOFF also raised this issue afterwards with the Americas and Pacific Director at the Foreign Ministry, and received a similar, cautiously optimistic response. END NOTE)

LYCHEE ORCHARD DEATH RESULTS IN INTERNAL INVESTIGATION
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17. (C) POLOFF and Ahmed also discussed the importance for the government to respond to specific cases raised by the Embassy, such as the beating death by RAB officers of a man in a lychee orchard outside of Rajshahi in May. (REFTEL) Ahmed said the officers involved have been suspended from field duty and are being kept at RAB headquarters in Dhaka while an internal investigation continues. A disciplinary hearing has been scheduled for early 2008. Ahmed expressed a personal interest in the case, and promised to brief POLOFF as soon as the investigation is completed. Ahmed also provided assurances he would follow up whenever the Embassy submitted specific cases to him.

COMMENT
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18. (C) This first meeting covered all the key issues and was further evidence of the GOB's desire to engage with the U.S.

Ahmed appeared to be empowered by the government to discuss these issues, and also seemed genuinely committed to improving the RAB's human rights record. Clearly, the USG has something the government wants -- Ahmed repeated several times how much the RAB wanted USG, rather than other countries' training assistance. The meeting also underscored the important role that the RAB plays in Bangladesh's counter terrorism efforts. We are encouraged by the GOB's willingness to confront past RAB excesses and engage in a dialogue with us about USG assistance in helping to further improve the RAB's human rights performance and overall professionalism. It will be important for us to be prepared to demonstrate our good faith in the short term by considering opportunities to engage the RAB, beginning with human rights training.

Pasi